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# NIETZSCHE: A DOCTOR FOR SICK SOULS

BY LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX

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THERE are two methods of coping with disease: the one consists in the application of approved remedies, the other in an attempt to ignore the illness by concentrating the mind upon opposing conditions by vigorously thinking of health. The former is still the method of conservative physicians; the latter is used by various new cults known as Christian Science, New Thought, and the like. With all the fierce vehemence of a Hebrew prophet, Nietzsche proclaimed in the last quarter of the last century that life was wrong and that he had found a cure. Alas! like other panaceas, his cure proved not infallible.

The new complete translation of the works of Nietzsche, under the editorship of Dr. Oscar Levy,\* has furnished an opening to various studies of Nietzsche. Anthony M. Ludovici furnishes a slight summary of Nietzsche's doctrine in the series *Philosophies: Ancient and Modern*. A. R. Orage has published an even slighter study, entitled *Friedrich Nietzsche, the Dionysian Spirit of the Age*; and within the year an English translation by J. M. Hone of Halévy's *Life of Friedrich Nietzsche* has appeared. The material then of Nietzsche's thought being now comfortably accessible to all American readers, it remains to be seen what influence this wounded and aristocratic thinker will have upon the happiest of modern democracies. It is unfortunate that translators should not have been more discreetly chosen. Nietzsche is first and foremost a poet, and to translate him adequately requires something more than even a scholastic knowledge of the two languages. Any one who will take the

\* The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche. First authorized English translation. Edited by Oscar Levy. Edinburgh and London: T. N. Foulis. New York: The Macmillan Company.

trouble to compare in "*Zarathushtra*," for example, the German and the English of such wonderful poems as "*Das Tanzlied*," "*Das trunkene Lied*," "*Die stillste Stunde*," will realize at once that what goes to make the grandeur and beauty of the original is entirely lost in the translation. The *Genealogy of Morals* again is done into an English which it is almost impossible to understand at all until one turns it back into German. Why should any one writing English exclaim, "But you understand this not"? This is neither German nor is it English, but a conglomeration of two languages most distracting to read. Whether or not one looks upon Nietzsche as a great philosopher who had a definite contribution to make to the history of philosophic thinking, he was an ardent and poetic psychologist and an interesting reactionary, and his work, if put into English at all, should have been done by scholars with a literary sense. Of the authorized translations done under the editorship of Dr. Oscar Levy, one need only say that, while they are fairly accurate and may convey the meaning of what Nietzsche had to say, every vestige of literary charm and power is lost. Nothing could have been more unfortunate for the poor author, whose sufferings during life one might have supposed an adequate torture, than this turning of his terse, lucid, beautiful prose into dull, hobbling, awkward English after his death.

It is doubtful whether Nietzsche will ever have a very wide circle of readers in America. Despite the fact that he is the ideal aristocrat and Whitman the ideal democrat, he has many points in common with our own unaccepted poet. They share the same grandiose egoism, the same courage to "sing myself," the same impatience with sick conscience, repentance, and remorse, and, finally, the same sense that as the individual acquires independence, freedom, and an expansive outlook he will become whole and well. Indeed, the two other thinkers of whom Nietzsche constantly reminds us are Whitman and Blake. With an intrepidity no less than that of the "mad poet" of the eighteenth century in England, Nietzsche batters down existing standards and proclaims anxieties about right and wrong mere fanciful illnesses; he exults in the time when men shall go through the world like "laughing lions." "Throw away displeasure with your own being," he says. "Forgive yourself for being what you are. In any case you have in your-

self a ladder with a hundred rounds upon which you may climb to consciousness."

In studying Nietzsche it is necessary to make a distinct cleavage between his earlier and his later periods. In his later work he repudiated all that was mystical and all that even verged upon the supernatural, even a great deal of his theory of the Dionysian spirit. His early volumes are full of this distinction between the two illusions that go to make up the worth of life—the Dionysian and the Apollonian. But he was wise enough even in those early days to warn us (*Morgen Röthe*) that any great thinker who fancied he was founding a binding institution for future men might know of a surety that the zenith of his power was passed and that he was moving toward his own sunset. The fluidity of life and thought, constant change as the condition of growth, mutability, that first grief of man on earth, and subject for lamentation of all the poets, was the crux of Nietzsche's doctrine, and he began by accepting it. This rolling world was nothing but the chaotic turning of brute matter into which man, by force of will, was to inject meaning; and in order to have a sound will, to be unhampered in his high and difficult task, he must harden himself. "Be hard, O man!" counsels Zarathushtra, repeatedly. "Turn all that is into the material of thought. . . . Impose your will and your standards upon the flux of growth (*des Werdens*). . . . Not change in itself is your danger, O men, and the end of good and evil, O ye wise! but that will itself, the will to power—the uncreate, productive Life-will!"

And in the same speech Zarathushtra adds: "He shall be bidden who cannot obey himself. That is the way of life. . . . Ordering is more difficult than obeying. Not only because the commander bears the burden of all the obedient and the burden easily becomes overwhelming, but because in every order there is daring and risk. And every time a man gives an order he risks his life. Yes, even when he commands himself; even then he must bear the results of his own command. He must be judge and avenger and sacrifice of his own law."

Why is this so? he then stops to ask. Why when there are so many dangers to brave will a man dare to command? And he adds: "Ponder well my reply, for I have crept into the heart of life itself and seen to the very roots of its heart."

"Wherever there is life there is the will to power. And

even in the heart of the servant is the will to be master."

"This secret Life whispered to me: I am that which must constantly conquer itself."

But to Nietzsche the conquest of self never took the form of renunciation and submission. These virtues he saw only as maladies and sicknesses, while growth and victory meant ever new daring, the facing of greater dangers; the invitation to change and growth to arrive and be overcome; to submit to the new valuations set by man and to become subject to his mastery. "He only who changes can remain related to me," he says with Emerson; and joined to this statement comes that mystical utterance: "I am not of those who can be asked 'why?' Was I born yesterday? It is long, long ago that I experienced the reason for my opinions. I should be no more than a vessel for memories if I carried my reasons about with me."

It is unnecessary to point out how alien is Nietzsche's whole attitude of mind to the American temper. He abhorred commercialism, humanitarianism, facile optimism, any form of casual, easy-going light-heartedness. The very foundation of his philosophy was to admit an evil world; to make no such slim excuses for it as that it was the best of all possible worlds while most things in it were necessary evils. On the contrary, he desired to impress the fact that it was an evil world because men, the sole creators of values and of significance, had failed to make it and themselves better.

One point in Nietzsche's personal history forms a parallel to Whitman's. During the Franco-Prussian War he became a volunteer nurse. Doubtless much of the doctrine of ruthless strength, and the need of hardness and invulnerability, grew out of his terrible suffering at the sights he saw when he crossed conquered Alsace, when he saw the misery and destruction of Weissenburg, Wörth, and Strasburg, and the inconceivable horrors of Metz, literally one great hospital for the wounded and suffering. Out of a like experience during the Civil War in our own land Whitman drew his sense of the solidarity of life, the doctrine of love as a solution of life's ills, a love which identifies each man's fate with that of all his kind. From the same experience Nietzsche emerged with his doctrine that the only way to

bear the horror of life was to be so hard that one could stand the downfall of part of humanity for the sake of the victory of the few, the chosen men of strong will. The truth is he was too thin-skinned, too sensitive, to stand life. Like Whitman, he began to envy the animals. Is it not amusing that both these writers should at the same time have expressed in almost identical language their envy of the animals, who do not lie awake at night and think of their sins, who are not possessed with the mania of owning things? Nietzsche looks forward to the time when philosophers shall be "laughing lions"; when the dangers of life shall not cause them a qualm and its eternal flux shall be received with joy. In his desire to see man strong, coping energetically with life, he stood for war as against peace and ease, for aristocracies as against the rulings of the people, for individualism as against socialism, for positive joy of living as against acceptance of pain.

He looked upon art as the means whereby men released themselves from the more sordid limitations of life. The Dionysian spirit in his earlier writings represented not only the creative energy of man, but that ecstasy of contemplation in which personality was temporarily dissolved and became one with the whole; a temporary victory of the "All" over the limited. Life consisted then in a constant interplay of the Dionysian and Apollonian spirits. It is only fair to add that Nietzsche always names these illusions—the two illusions whereby life may be made to appear desirable. The Dionysian illusion is that in which man, by contemplative ecstasy, becomes a creative energy; the Apollonian illusion actually makes forms in formless space, draws lines and lures beauty into shape. The world regarded as a work of art is, then, the Apollonian illusion. It teaches men to desire life, because life is an unbroken chase after beauty. When we are possessed by the desire of beauty, we call life back again and again because the pursuit is worth while. On the other hand, when man ceases to feel himself a separate, single being, ceases to realize his limited, fragmentary self, but feels himself instead as a breath of the eternal wind of will that sweeps through the spheres of the infinite, he becomes by virtue of his relations and conceptions indestructible and eternal. Man escapes thus the terrifying spectacle of death; he escapes pessimism, he loses his suffering in the contemplation of the eternity of will

beneath the perpetual flux of life. Then, again, he is strong enough to recall life over and over, because he rejoices in its grandeur. Thus life was to be made bearable, not by making it easier or by diminishing the sum of suffering, but by enlarging our conceptions of life, by conceiving it as more intense, more grandiose, more imposingly beautiful. "All that is good," he says, "helps me to be productive. I have no other proof of what is good." It was, then, through the constant interplay of the two illusions, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, the active productive principle and the restraint of the rules of art constantly outlining energy that life was to be made worthy. If it is true that when art draws lines mysticism rubs them out, it is only to enlarge the concepts somewhat around which art draws. Wherever contemplation erases the boundary lines, art returns to her task and works again on a larger scale in wider spheres. And to this contest there is no end. Dionysius, the life principle, continually produces, and Apollo finds form a structure for each new concept. "Make life," he might have said in contradiction to the teachings of the two great religions. "Make life; do not renounce it." It was suffering and compliance and a broken spirit, thought Nietzsche, which had finally consoled itself with inventing a heaven and a hereafter in which to store its joys. It was a wholesome instinct of Nietzsche's to draw back attention to the present moment and to insist upon that present moment as the only foundation for a repetition of beauty and strength. "Man is a bridge and a goal," he says in one place; and, again, "Man is a transit and an exit." What Nietzsche aimed at doing was to get rid of the idea of an absolute good and evil and to substitute an immediate sense of good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, worth while or unworthy. The essence of Christian morality he mistook to be the desire of the individual to save his soul; and thus boldly stated, this seems a most ignoble aim. It is only when one realizes that what that meant was that each individual should strive to subject his lower nature to his higher in the interests of all that one sees that our western religion and our Teutonic philosopher were really aiming at one and the same mark: to make of man "an arrow and an aspiration after superman." Again, Nietzsche objected to shifting the burden of improving life upon God or upon evolution. Man by deliberate choice and by imposing his will was to create

values and affirm a worthy life. This is the meaning of his proclamation in *Zarathushtra*: "God is dead. Now, men," he calls, "it is your time to make an effort; to create worth for life, since there is no outside help. The very roots of good and evil are in your own hearts; they are not in life, in chance, in luck, or in a hereafter." The proclamation is amazingly like one made long before: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

Of woman and marriage Nietzsche has said a great deal; most of it is unpardonably stupid as coming from a brilliant thinker; much of it is self-contradictory, but then Nietzsche announces: "The world is large enough to contain all contradictions." One must remember, however, that while a great deal that he said is cryptic and mystical and sheer foolishness, it was, after all, Nietzsche who said: "The perfect woman is a higher type than the perfect man and a much rarer." One would like to ask here what becomes of his theory that the highest type is always that of the fighter, the conqueror, the one who imposes will, while all Nietzsche's other ideas of woman are purely Paulistic and Miltonic. Again, he jeers at those who marry for any motive other than "inward necessity," and by this he means the most spiritual impulse, for he adds that marriage is only pardonable between those who have the most profound respect for each other and an unconquerable will shared by both to upbuild nobility of nature in each other and in their offspring, and to attain for themselves and their heirs the highest degree of self-development. "Marriage," he says, "is the name I give to the will of two to create that which shall be higher than its creators." If in other places he has spoken cynically and slightly of women, it was of those "who have no insides, but are only masks." "The man is to be pitied who is caught by such ghosts. Such women often know how to lure man, and he seeks and seeks for a soul and shall go on seeking." Here again we find Nietzsche illogical and superficial. There has never been a profound thinker who carried sex distinction below the surface of life; the soul is sexless. And there is not a word Nietzsche has uttered of women that might not be just as well applied to men.

In form Nietzsche has the identical virtues and flaws that we find in his thought. His work is all in the form of the personal confession. Each book was a fresh attempt to ex-



plain himself, to give his experience and the resultant attitude toward life. Although he succeeded best in that wonderful poem, "*Zarathushtra*," it needs all his other volumes to throw light upon that cryptic, lyrical utterance. If one except the three essays which make up the volume called the *Genealogy of Morals*, all his books are written in the form of detached fragments or aphorisms. "What others say in a book," he says, "I press into a sentence—the form of Eternity." The truth is, Nietzsche thought in sudden flashes and only at broken intervals. Fluidity of thought, power of concentration, the patient unfolding and upbuilding of his thought were impossible to him. He lacked just that constructive power, that ἀρχιτεκτονική which is the mark of the profoundest thinkers. The aphorism is the prose form of the lyric, embodying individual and subjective feeling. Appealing as it is, it is never as impressive and imposing as an epic or dramatic form which embodies the universal and the objective. Nietzsche is mistaken when he says, "The affirmation makes a more powerful impression than argument." It merely makes a quicker and a lighter impression. It is easily overthrown by reflection. In confining himself to this form, unless, indeed, Nietzsche was confined to it by the very quality of his mind and his inherent limitations, he overlooked the misunderstandings that arise from receiving a whole system of philosophy in broken-off bits. He is known as a fanatical antichrist and a ruthless iconoclast. Yet many of his profoundest utterances are mere echoes, as I have shown in one case of the sayings of Christ. His own mystical theory of Dionysian ecstasy he himself denied in his later work, labeling it as belonging to his "mystical period" and proclaimed it no more than a lovely but worthless illusion. "There are moments," he says, "when we must rest from ourselves; see ourselves from above and below and around, so that we can laugh at and weep over ourselves from the outside." And this was ultimately, in a new contradiction, the only value that he gave to art, that it should by selection so raise the main and significant features of life that the mean and the sordid could be overlooked. Thus, as a result of his fragmentary method, instead of one well-built theory of art (and only the superficial reader will fail to see the underlying unity in the two statements of the functions of art) we have two broken fragments, apparently mutually destructive.

The form of Nietzsche's discourse was undoubtedly the result of his broken health. He was a terrible sufferer all his life. He was timid, supersensitive, profoundly wounded by life. His almost hysterical scream for health, for strength, for hardness, was as touching a personal confession of his sufferings as Job's denials. His yearning for aristocratic seclusion was the result of his endless difficulty in dominating his surroundings, his inability to withdraw himself from a humanity that obtruded itself and wounded him at every turn. But, like the Christian Scientists, he concentrated his whole thought upon hardness, upon strength, upon lofty, if lonely, aspirations. And not only does his face, in successive portraits, become more energetic, more domineering, but, despite the long torment of physical suffering, it gains in strength, in the expression of victory. When finally, at the tragic end, his mind gave way, and the final hold upon coherent thought loosened, it was a sense of victory that haunted his madness. He wrote to Brandes:

"Since you have discovered me, it is not wonderful to find me: what is difficult now is to lose me—the Crucified."

To another friend the letter ran: "Sing me a new song. The world is clear and all the skies rejoice." While to Burckhardt what he wrote was in the form of a strange and mad hint at the doctrine of cosmic consciousness, that sense common to all great seers of the identity of all men, all experience: "I am Ferdinand de Lesseps," he wrote, "I am Prado, I am Chambige (two notorious assassins of the moment). I have been buried twice this autumn."

After this there came the pitiful ten years of twilight when Nietzsche lived innocent and harmless, but without memory, without coherent thought. In one of his last letters he wrote: "I have written such beautiful books. How should I not be grateful to life?" And in the last few years when books were handed to him he would ask, gropingly, "Have I not written books, too—good books—long ago?"

He died in 1900, and whatever we may find to refute in his books and his doctrines, they remain excellent tonics for weak souls. Many poisons are in his medicines, but, to stick to the analogy, the poisons in measured doses brace the system. He urged man to accept the responsibility of himself, to shoulder his burden, to grow strong, aye, to grow tough by bearing it and to find himself each day standing

higher than yesterday, with his foot raised for the new step to-morrow.

The strong man may be less conscious of his strength than the struggling invalid. The great religions that Nietzsche attacked took for granted man's love of life, man's strength not only to live, but to give; but Nietzsche was a sufferer, a hopeless invalid, cheering and bracing and exhorting the weak and the sick. It is immensely to his credit to have conquered pessimism and to have conceived of a life whose joys were so great that its pains might be recalled. One constantly hears another say, "I should like to live my life over, knowing what I know now," and in so saying the speaker thinks to escape the pains that he unwittingly invited. Nietzsche knew that great joys are joined to great pains, and all he asked was that neither joys nor pains should be mean and sordid. Do you remember the "*Round-Song of Zarathushtra*"?

"O man! Listen!  
What does the deep midnight say?  
I slept—I slept—  
And I awakened from a deep dream.  
The world is deep,  
Deeper than daylight knows.  
Pain is deep—  
And joy deeper than heart's sorrow.  
Pain speaks: Pass on!  
But Joy demands eternal return,  
Demands the deep endlessness of Infinity."

LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX.